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NSC BRIEFING

5 DECEMBER 1956

BACKGROUND: SOVIET ANTARCTIC ACTIVITY

I. Sov interest in the 6 million ice-covered square miles of our seventh continent, heretofore about on a par with other nations active in the whaling trade (UK, Norway, Japan), has expanded vastly during the past year as a result of the international Antarctic program for the IGY.

A. First Russian contact with area dates back to Czar Alexander I, who ordered exploratory voyages of Bellingshausen (1819-22)

B. Antarctic whale-catch accounts for 80% of world's whale-oil production. Starting in 1946, Soviet whalers have made annual Antarctic visit. In '54-'55 season, eight nations had factory-ships, catchers and shore stations active in Antarctic whaling; that season, the Sov factory-ship Slava and fleet of 15 catchers killed 3,290 whales, produced some 30,000 tons of oil.

C. Starting in Jan '56, Sovs began major Antarctic scientific effort in preparation for IGY. On 5 Jan, the Arctic "floating laboratory" vessel, Ob, arrived at Australian-claimed sector on Davis sea coast (map) and established the Soviet main base--named Mirnyy ("peaceful", the name of Bellingshausen's flagship). Ob was followed by her sister-ship Lena and a third craft. By March 18, the Sovs had offloaded at Mirnyy:

1. Over 8,000 tons of provisions, fuel and equipment;
2. 40 vehicles and 6 aircraft (including transports, helicopters and light planes);
3. 355 scientific and support personnel (92 of whom "wintered over").

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II. In addition to the Mirnyy main base, the Sovs in this first season established two other permanent bases.

- A. Mirnyy, itself, consists of 49 winterproof buildings, with housing for 92 individuals. The Sov Antarctic expedition's 6 planes, and most of its 40 vehicles, are based there.
- B. Pionerskaya ("Pioneer") is the first inland base ever established in Antarctica. 250 miles from Mirnyy, at an altitude of 9,000 ft., it was established by an 11-man motor-sledge team, assisted by air-lift, during the first season. Pionerskaya has a mile-long air-strip. Four of the establishing team (including two scientists) "wintered over" to maintain operations of weather, snow-measuring and aerological stations.
- C. Oazis ("Oasis") is the third permanent Sov base at present. On the coast, 224 miles from Mirnyy, it takes its name from the ice-free character of the 200-sq. mi. area in which it is situated (this unusual bit of exposed ground was first explored by Americans of the USN Operation High-Jump in 1947, and was named Bunker Hills after one of the party).
 1. Manning of the Oazis base is not presently known. Initial facilities include three prefab houses, tents, a small tractor, and a radiostation.
 2. However, the ice-free terrain could be developed to serve as the main Soviet airbase, in preference to the snow-packed runway at Mirnyy.

III. In addition to establishment of these three bases, the Sov expedition accomplished the following work during its first season:

- A. Air-mapped over 5,000 sq. mil. of coast and interior, with ground control.

- B. Photographed and surveyed 2,700 mi. of coast for marine charting.
- C. Flew some 13,000 miles of coastal and interior terrain and ice reconnaissance and covered some 300 miles on the ground.
- D. Operated 4 "mobile" research stations around Mirnyy.
- E. Made daily radiosonde and radio-pilot weather observations, involving seven different meteorological stations.
- F. Ran intensive geographic and geologic studies of the Mirnyy and Oazis areas, as well as island and coast work. Sovs now have general geologic information on area from Mt. Gauss to the Knox Coast (map.).
- G. Began ionospheric and geomagnetic observations and made preparations for seismic soundings.
- H. In process of coming and going, ran 20,000 miles of oceanographic survey in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

IV. In process of these activities, Sovs also took actions interpretable as claim-staking:

- A. Held at least 4 ceremonial flag-raisings.
- B. Gave the boss of Mirnyy base the title of "mayor of the future city".
- C. Announced "discovery" of two island groups, some uncharted coastline.
- D. Gave Russian names to physical features in vicinity of Mirnyy.
- E. Declared Haswell Islands a game preserve.
- F. Buried records of their activities in two separate caches.

V. Ambitious as was "summer" '56 session, Sov "summer" '57 plans are even broader.

- A. Three new permanent stations envisaged: Vostok ("East") at

500 miles from the Pole between 50° and 60°E longitude, and
Komosomol'skaya ("of the Young Communist League") at ^{70°S-80°E} [some
intermediate point between Mirnyy and Sovetskaya.]

- B. In addition to the present four "mobile" stations, 50 to 60 are planned.
- C. Start of 3,600 miles of ground traverse, covering sector with coastal arc of 1,000 mi., also planned.
- D. In addition to ship supply of expedition, long-range flights from USSR (via Australia) also envisioned.

VI. With so large-scale a program (exceeding in scope, and possibly in duration, requirements of IGY program participation), question of Sov motivation arises. In probable ascending order of importance, these motives appear to be economic, political and strategic:

- A. Economic--in immediate future, data now being gathered should be useful to expanding Sov whaling flotilla. In longer range, Sov reconnaissance (geology in particular) could provide guidance for appraising economically worthwhile areas for a possible claim in any international partition of continent.
- B. Political--firm establishment of permanent facilities, plus Sov emphasis on weak basis of many other national claims to Antarctic sectors, suggests that USSR intends to have voice in any eventual international partition. Up to present, USSR--like US--while not recognizing territorial claims of other nations, has reserved its own right.

C. Strategic--air and sea supply operations are both adding to Sov experience and capability in long-range navigation and operations. However, even more important is fact that geodetic data collected, in combination with Sov gravity studies not now available to West, should give USSR considerable advantage in field of long-range missile guidance.